NEWS AND COMMENT IN THE WORLD OF ART

By HENRY McBRIDE.

THE chief astonishment at the Courbet Centenary Exhibition is that such an imposing collection of this master's works could be assembled in this country. He is well but sparsely represented in our museums. The Metropolitan owns the "Girl with the Parrot," rightly considered by that keen critic, Mr. Coady, to be one of the greatest works of art in America; the Boston Museum just lately acquired the wonderful "Quarry," and the Pennsylvania Academy owns the "Mayor of Ornans." These three works are fine and important in the history of the artist, but they are not sufficient to place Courbet perfectly in the minds of the newcomers. Fortunately private collectors in America possess some of the greatest of the Courbet portraits, and as these and "The Quarry" and the "Mayor of Ornans" and some landscapes have all been lent the exhibition is as satisfactory as possible. Indeed, it is more than satisfactory, it is a great joy, and doubtless it will have its full educational effect upon the impressionable among our young folk.

This was probably the real excuse for the exhibition in the minds of its promoters, although it has not been so stated, the hope that the influence of such a robust, healthful, outdoor talent might go far in calming the high strung, overwrought nerves of those who would be our artistic spokesmen. Courbet has had formative influence already upon Americans, as Mr. Burroughs points out in his admirable preface to the catalogue, and Eakins, Whistler and even Winslow Homer owe much to him. He was such a turbulent, forceful, magnetic spirit that the power he exerted upon his contemporaries is easily understood, and in fact it is still impossible, in the presence of his pictures, to resist it. Nine young painters out of ten when viewing "The Quarry" and "The Amazon" will say, "By George, that's the way to paint!"

It was the way to paint—for Courbet. However, if the Metropolitan Museum really has the best interests of our young people at heart it will step right up at this juncture, once it makes sure the young person has uttered the remark above quoted, with an offer of some of Dr. Bashford Dean's stoutest armor and the earnest exhortation to the embryo artist to gird up his loins and fight manfully against just that feeling. He has no earthly shadow of a right to paint like Courbet. Those caught trying to paint like Courbet should be instantly tried before a jury of Independent Artists, such as Walter Pach, the Baronesse von Freitag-Loringhoven and Miss Julia Kelly, and condemned to exhibit exclusively in the Academy during the rest of their stupid lives.

I think any one who would attempt to adopt the mannerisms of Courbet at this late date would be peculiarly stupid. But the warning is necessary since it is a form of mental lassitude to which we as a nation seem particularly susceptible, and at almost any time it is possible to see in our galleries hollow mockeries of Manet, Renoir, Cezanne and every other fashionable celebrity that looms above the European horizon. Homer and Eakins did not achieve fame of their own by copying Courbet's brush stroke, but by learning from him to look upon nature through their own eyes. Courbet was an exalted being. Their own souls rose to a higher level at the contemplation of the master's commanding attitude toward life. In that way Courbet can still legitimately assist the wise.

The pictures chosen for illustration are "The Amazon" and "The Grinders." "The Amazon" is a portrait of Louise Colet, a writer of short stories, and the picture is considered by Riat, who wrote one of the best of Courbet's biographies, to be one of the artist's most beautiful portraits. That it foreshadowed effects that Manet and Whistler developed afterward in different directions is obvious. "The Grinders," as it happens, is an astonishing precursor to things seen in Cezanne. It is not so much that the workmen correspond to the types of Cezanne's peasants, but the composition itself has something of the same kind of precision practised by the genius of Aix.

The preface to the catalogue, by Bryson Burroughs, will be found an excellent preparation for an acquaintance with the paintings. Courbet fulfilled the type so insistently sought for by Emerson and Carlyle, who were continually preaching that it was not the gun but the man back of the gun that counted. Mr. Burroughs sums up the stormy career of our artist as follows:

"No nineteenth century painter has had a deeper or more widespread influence than Gustave Courbet, the founder of the realistic school that has furnished so many of the greatest names to modern art. Nothing should be invented, he held; only things actually seen should be represented and the function of the imagination is to find the fullest expression of the chosen subject.

"His principles have been particularly potent in America from 1875 down to almost our own day. Three of the foremost American painters, Whistler, Homer and Eakins, were his followers—Whistler directly, whereby many of his characteristics and peculiarities were determined and his early style formed, while Homer and Eakins throughout their entire careers show their reliance on him. It is therefore fitting that the 100th anniversary of his birth, which took place on June 10, 1819, should be commemorated in this country.

"The present loan exhibition consists of pictures chosen from the splendid series of his works owned here, which were gathered mostly before the acquisition of important examples became impossible. Our collectors were among the early ones to appreciate his excellence. To America, indeed, belongs the honor of being the first of foreign lands to own one of his masterpieces, 'The Quarry' (La Curée) was bought by the Allston Club of Boston in 1866. It has lately passed into the possession of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and has been generously lent for this occasion.

"Looking back from our distance it is obvious that Courbet's principles were inevitably the outcome of the artistic development. The realism of the seventeenth century had been followed by the courtly ideality of the eighteenth; this, in turn, was displaced by the interest in classic art which to those of the time seemed a return to nature, and such it was as far as many of its elements were concerned.

"David, the leader of the Classicists, was entirely a naturalist in his portraits and he anticipated the evolution in frequently choosing subjects from contemporary life, like the 'Oath at the Tennis Court' and his pictures of imperial ceremonies. His pupils, Ingres and Gros, carried their naturalism still further, particularly the latter; and Géricault, his follower, might perhaps have forestalled Courbet's realism had he lived. Géricault's paintings of animals show the direction in which he was proceeding."

"Realism was an instinct with Courbet. As a student he felt himself drawn to the great realists of the past—Holbein, Ribera, Caravaggio, Velazquez, the little Dutch Masters, and above all Rembrandt, 'the exact image of life,' he said, 'who charms the intelligent but stuns and massacres the imbeciles.' His early works were portraits, of himself mostly, and landscapes, with only a very few efforts in the direction of the then fashionable Romanticism; the picture of 'Lot and His Daughters,' now in America, being one of these. His bent from the first was to copy exactly what he saw, and his work had none of the artificial arrangements and embellishments that even innovators like Rousseau or Corot felt called upon to make in their more ambitious pictures. In this, as in all his practices, he seems merely to have abandoned himself to his preferences, with no idea of establishing a new æstheticism, until the idea was suggested to him by theorizing friends. Realism was in the air and was making itself felt in literature as well as in painting.

"Under these circumstances it is hard to understand the abuse that greeted Courbet's pictures when they appeared as a force about 1850. His history was no different from that of other painters of original genius. There were a few in the middle of the hubbub who believed in him, and the number slowly increased until general recognition and official sanction came. But the time of triumph in his case was cut short by the political events in which he had become enmeshed, leading to his decline and to his death in exile.

"He came of a peasant family in comfortable circumstances at Ornans, Franche-Comté. He had no gift for classical studies or literary culture, only for painting. The artist revealed through his pictures is an energetic, exuberant person of enormous appetites, filled with the joy of life and the love of his work. His genius lay in his susceptibility to the power and fecundity of nature and his marvellous power of expressing these in his art.

"He had a boundless admiration for himself, both for his person and for his abilities in all particulars, joined to an ever increasing hunger for celebrity. He remained always as impulsive and as heedless as a schoolboy. His latest biographer, his friend Théodore Duret, makes these facts clear. Duret tells an incident that is significant. When past 50 Courbet surprised his friends at a party that was celebrating his final successes, by walking at noon through the main street of Bougival, clad only in bathing trunks, a bath towel thrown over one shoulder, with the object of shocking the townspeople! It was a similar devil-may-care spirit, seemingly, that prompted his activities during the Commune.

"Among those who in the early days applauded his work were intellectual people who saw in it the manifestation in painting of what they themselves were preaching. Proudhon, the social reformer, was of the number, and Courbet frequently served as text in his book, 'L'Art et sa Destination Sociale.' 'The Stonebreakers, for instance (one of the early pictures of the same time and sort as 'The Grinders' of this exhibition), Proudhon pronounced as precious morally as one of the Parables. It is a picture of two men working at the roadside—one old and miserable, brutalized by his monotous labor, and the other young. Proudhon found in the painting many statements; for example, that the young were victimized; that slavery was preferable to the social order of the time because slaves as assets were protected from overwork as were beasts of burden; that no one could be certain of escaping misery and poverty; that the condition of the stone-breakers was that of six million souls in France. His conclusion was that the picture should be set up as an altarpiece in some church. Of course Courbet, in its execution, had thought only of setting down a familiar spectacle, but he was quite ready, nevertheless, to consider himself the Messiah of the Social Revolution.

"So he assumed the position. It is time to regenerate humanity as I have regenerated painting; this was his attitude. After the fall of Napoleon III. his opportunity for action came. He stayed in Paris during the siege, and was named the president of an unofficial commission of artists selected to take charge of the works of art belonging to the people. As such he asked for authorization to take down (*deboulonner*) the Vendome column, wishing to remove a monument to Napoleon and the Grande Armee which celebrated despotism and conquest, and and besides stood for the imperial regime that was responsible for the plight of France.

"The destruction of the column did not take place until later under the Commune. Though Courbet was not of the voting body that decided upon the action, he was held responsible for it by the Republic, was imprisoned, and finally condemned to pay the cost of the reconstruction, amounting to 323,000 francs. He cut a sorry figure at the trial, and in 1873 escaped to Switzerland. Though he continued to paint remarkable pictures, his old pride and defiance had been quenched in his troubles. He died in 1877.

"His commentators without exception feel called upon to condone his personality, but what was questionable in the man becomes admirable in the artist. All his abilities were concentrated in his art, and there, because he was a great painter, unreason and vanity are transmuted into steadfastness and sublime self-confidence. His genius had clearly defined limitations, to be sure; but once these be recognized and accepted, his rank is unquestionably with the greatest."

"The Amazon," by Courbet, Centenary Exhibition, Metropoli tan Museum.

"The Widow," by George Bellows, on view Knoedler Galleries.

A Little Group of Serious Thinkers.

MR. HENRY MCBRIDE:

Dear Sir—Permit me to proffer a very mild protest to your statement in to-day's SUN regarding the scarcity of nudes among painters in the city. No doubt you are laboring under nebulous inescience as to the fact that many bachelors still keep alive the female form alluring on their countless canvases. To curtail undue length to this communication allow me to illumine your soul by making you aware that I for one can boast of possessing a collection of over 1,000 paintings that portray pleasing females, celebrate charming girls in groups of four to ten, and represent diverse women in subjects classical, dramatic and allegorical. This collection is not monotonous, as each picture is utterly different from the other thousand and one. So you notice that a very few other artists are able to hold the monopoly on nudes.

Think of it! over 1,000 nudes!

LOUIS M. EILSHEMIUS.

Supreme Spirit of the Spheres.

I stand corrected. I had quite forgot there were bachelors of arts.

ART EDITOR NEW YORK SUN:

Dear Sir Henry—You recall that Whistler, when he first met Joe Pennell, said: "Ha! So you are the man who stole the title of my 'Little Venice.'"

Perhaps you recall a picture of mine shown with the Eclectics three or four years ago called "The Widow." Now I find a picture on view at Knoedler's painted by G. Bellows called "The Widow." I hope you'll be sure to assure Mr. Gregg of the *Herald* that good natured Mr. Bellows meant nothing like plagiarism in using my title, and splashing pretty close to my composition and color scheme. For Mr. Gregg, you know, "means" to get things right.

I commend Mr. Bellows for his "Widow." It is quite one of the best things he has done. Naturally I prefer my own "Widow" and am glad to find Mr. Bellows seeking inspiration nearer home than Goya or Manet could bring him.

Yours with or without irony,

JAMES BRITTON.

You are strangely premature. The British Government has not as yet knighted me. Why don't you assure Mr. Gregg your own self?

MY DEAR MCBRIDE:

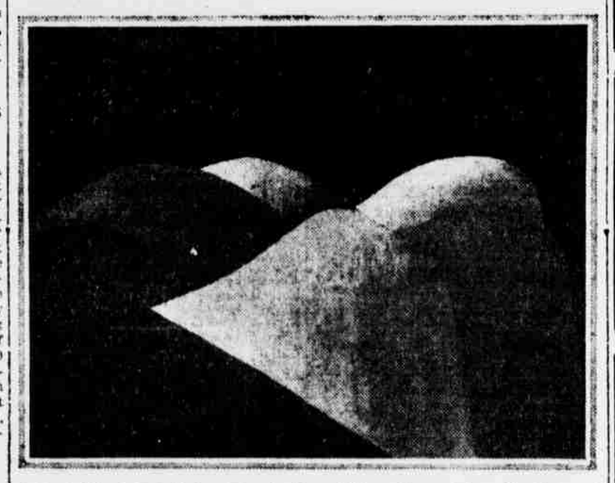
My curiosity is strangely aroused. Possibly you can satisfy it. Can you tell me why American Painting for the Luxembourg in Paris should have been restricted to "Oil"? Can you tell me whether sculpture was restricted to real marble?

Are the Luxembourg art authorities responsible for these restrictions? If so, is it because they have become humorists, hoping that American oils might quiet the wildly turbulent waters of the day?

Above all I'd like to know why one isn't able to find on the list of official "Invites" the names of John Marin, Demuth, Arthur G. Dove, Marsden Hartley, Oscar Bluemner, S. McD. Wright, Margaret Zorach, Ben Benn, Walt Kuhn (just a few random New York names). Whey were they ignored? Are they not as expressive of American art as 99 per cent. of the names appearing in the official list? They have all "oiled," although perhaps the committee may have thought of many of them primarily in terms of "Water," "Pastel" and "Rot."

In sculpture how about Lachaise, Diedrichs and Secret Service Wolff? Perhaps real marble is still above their pocket means. But stranger than strange is the unpardonable oversight in not inviting the greatest of all American "Oilists," who seems to be truly King in these Days of Greatest Democracy. Why was not he whom all true American artists avowedly hate—yet whom the bulk secretly aspire to win as personal friend—invited, the only genuine oilist—John D? ALFRED STIEGLITZ.

I am afraid I cannot rise to your pitch of rebellion, Stieglitz, in regard to this particular committee, which greatly astonished me by inviting works of Max Weber, Miss Julia Kelly, Samuel Halpert, Mr. Bouche and other up to date people. I do not expect official art committees ever to get within ten years of the times we live in, and the exceptions mentioned pleased me. I should have been quite proud, as an American, to have had the French see what Marin, Demuth, Hartley, Lachaise and Diedrichs have been doing, but I am not impatient. I know they will see them later. In the meantime either our committees are making progress or the Luxembourg committee is what botanists call a "sport."



"The Third Day," by Frank Van Vleet Tompkins, Society of Independent Artists.

Notes and Activities in Art World.

Mr. Bellows's exhibition of war pictures and portraits in the Knoedler Galleries will scarcely dissipate the feeling that is shared by many that this artist has become entangled in some sort of a mental bog and needs to be rescued by somebody or something. There is the same distressing color, the same heaviness in drawing and the same tendency to say with vehemence something that has already been said by others; and these restrictions were noted last year.

The war pictures have been done at a distance of several thousand miles from the front, from descriptions furnished by our most spirited special correspondents. There is nothing essentially wrong in that and a painter with vivid emotional and imaginative powers needs not participate in the battle in order to paint it, but unfortunately this artist instead of trying to imagine what certain individuals would do under given circumstances puts all his effort in trying to think what Manet and other artists would have had them do. In consequence Mr. Bellows's borrowed thunder about Miss Cavell and the other martyrs shocks in the wrong direction.

In color some of these works are quite ghastly. It is unpleasant to have to report such a thing and yet after all the truth must be faced, preferably sooner than later. In some of the portraits of little girls the lights are strangely yellow, so much so that the poor little things look unwell. This may be due to some yellow reflections that pour through the artist's skylight. It may be that they disappear beneath the electric lights. And then the eyes of these people; the heavy unseeing, fish-like eyes! Even "The Widow," that one of our correspondents admires in another column, has fish-like eyes.

Mr. Blum, who has had the upper Knoedler Gallery during the week, has been as much subjugated by Cezanne as Mr. Bellows has been by Manet. He has been going in excessively for yellows, too, like Mr. Bellows, and so the only good thing to be said about him at present is that he found a capital place in the south of France, St. Tropez, in which to paint. St. Tropez in fact almost does too much for an artist.

The experiment of the Society of Independent Artists in giving their lively show this year at the Waldorf-Astoria is meeting with pronounced success. The public are going in bigger numbers than ever to see the nearly 700 works of art on view this year. Whether the fact that the Independents have gone to the Waldorf is accepted as proof of their seriousness and respectability or not, the public is taking this year's pictures, &c., with much graver mien than on the two previous years. The fact that many pictures have already been sold will more than solace their owners for the fact that the society sticks to its principle of "no prizes" and, of course, "no jury."

One source of this year's success is undoubtedly the fact that the show has been to some extent planned. The "Alphabetical Soviets" which did the hanging did it very well, even if it is clear in some cases that first comers were best served. The light in the Waldorf is excellent, and every one seems much happier than at the ordinary show. These Independents have a happy way with them, even if they are going to turn the world of art upside down. It is a fine gain for them that the public interested in art is really coming to understand the seriousness of their purpose. The show continues until April 15.

The Brooklyn Museum announces an exhibition of drawings by Frank Mura. Many of these are in pencil, others in colored chalk and many are in pencil with delicate water color wash. Mr. Mura's present exhibition derives especial interest from the fact that it deals mostly with native and Long Island subjects. It was only in 1917 that he left his Paris studio to reside in the United States. Born in 1861, in Alsace, he was taken by his parents to New York as a child and brought up here, becoming a naturalized American citizen. He made his studies as an artist mainly in Holland and in Munich; subsequently he resided for many years in England, especially in Sussex and Essex, and it was not until 1914 that he removed to Paris.